

PR 4501
C4 Z5

4501
Z5

C
PR 4501
.C4 Z5
Copy 1

INTemperance

THE PRELUDE TO

GAMBLING AND SUICIDE,

AS ILLUSTRATED IN THE LIFE OF THE

REV. C. C. COLTON,

AUTHOR OF "LAGON;"

BY

LEWIS C. LEVIN;

DELIVERED BEFORE THE SOCIETIES ATTACHED TO LA FAYETTE
COLLEGE, EASTON, SEPTEMBER 18, 1844, AND

PUBLISHED BY THEIR REQUEST.

PHILADELPHIA:
PRINTED BY WILLIAM F. GEDDES,
No. 112 Chesnut Street.

1845.

3 2 2 4 1 9
2 4

...

REV. C. C. COLTON.

7R 4501

C4Z5

IN the creation of intellectual power, there is a Divinity that shapes our ends, which reason seeks in vain to baffle,—which pride labours in vain to escape. Genius, magnificent in its display of imagination—proud in its consciousness of power—towering in its ambition—vast in the grandeur and sweep of its sublime conceptions—aspires to surpass the limits of human achievement—spreads out its daring pinions to the wild breeze of fancy—and pants to conquer time and space, in one bold flight, as if the victory was only to be the daughter of the wish, and to be great was only to be ambitious. However potent this delusion, it is experience only, that can dissipate a dream which fills the heart with rapture, and intoxicates the mind to madness. In the consciousness of power, the daring of genius loses sight of the existence of impossibilities, and becomes insensible that it can err or fall. Lulled to the confidence of safety by the song of its own triumphs, it becomes a prey to the delusion, that its intellectual power can avert its moral downfall; that its mighty energies can grasp evil to its bosom and yet escape the poison of its fangs—sweeping with its golden plumes the lowest pits of pestilential vice, without soiling their lustre, or losing their elasticity.

It is in the daring character of genius, that we behold at once, the grandeur of its conceptions, and the imbecility of its virtue; the gorgeous magnificence of its courage, shaded by the humility if not shame of its vanquished feebleness. What so vast that genius will not attempt to grasp? What so colossal that it will not struggle to subdue? What so dangerous that it will not dare to front? Treating difficulties with derision, it overcomes them. Opposing energy to dangers, it subdues them. Wherever mind grapples with mind, or struggles with matter, it triumphs. But here end all the victories; here subsides all the glory of genius. Temptation overwhelms it!

On the field where it presumes to display most courage, where it vaunts invincible strength, and boasts Herculean power, it sinks to the impotence of infancy. Where the passions wage their im-

petuous war against virtue, or clothed in syren smiles, they chaunt seductive strains of melody in pleasure's ear, Genius like a naked child, sinks helpless beneath their feet. It can repel violence—it can resist oppression—it can vanquish force—it can dare—do—defy—struggle—expire in any combat, with foes that rouse its ire, or kindle its revenge—but it cannot resist temptation. Before the smiles of beauty, it melts a helpless victim. In the vortex of dissipation, it sinks never to rise again. The excitements of wine, exhilarate it to madness; the pleasures of the world bewilder it to its ruin. Smiles overwhelm it.

What a strange delusion, that on the only point of its weakness, Genius deems itself invincible! On this rock split all the great minds, that with fatal temerity, trusting to their fortitude and powers of resistance, yield themselves helpless slaves to temptation! Reeling powerless through the world of pleasure, to find repose only in that grave dug by their own vices, intemperance and guilt.

An extraordinary illustration of the truth of these remarks is presented in the erratic character and variable career of the Rev. C. C. Colton; a man, whose talents have formed so remarkable a theme for admiration to the world, while his vices have excited a strain of lamentation, not inferior to the compassion which humanity has poured in eloquent tones of tenderness over his melancholy and premature end. It has been left for a clergyman, a poet, and a scholar of the nineteenth century, to display to the wondering gaze of a startled world, the ruinous career of a libertine, who appreciated virtue, revered religion, and was familiar with life, both as a subject for pleasure, and as a pledge for immortality—and yet could neither bend to the laws of the one, bow to the holiness of the other, nor enjoy, without abusing, the pleasures, passions, and raptures of the last!

Singular as it may seem, and startling as it is, it has been left for our own enlightened era to demonstrate, in the person of its most luminous philosopher, the utter futility of human wisdom, sparkling wit, and profound scholarship, to afford an anchor for the passions, amidst the storms and commotions of life. So familiar with the world as to treat it as a toy, and handle it like a plaything—yet he became its dupe and fell a victim to its frauds. So convinced of the poison of Intemperance, as to moralize nobly

on its folly, as well as its guilt; yet he wallowed in its excesses till he became its slave. And so sensible of the madness of gaming, as to make the blood tingle in the veins of him who reads his account of its horrors; yet he became what he most loathed upon earth, the unparalleled proficient, the triple crowned monster of Drunkard, Gambler and Suicide! Why? Because he defied temptation. That temptation which is to guilt, what the torch fires are to the moth that flutter around the warmth of the blaze, only to become victims to the flame—that temptation—to resist which, is itself virtue!

The author of “Lacon” has acquired a fame so brilliant, and a celebrity so unbounded, as to substitute the title of his Book for the name of the man; and thousands and tens of thousands who have never heard whispered the name of the Rev. C. C. Colton, quote with fluency the wise sayings of the sententious “Lacon,” while they bow in the homage of admiration to the giant might of his genius.

Among the ancient sages, whether renowned for philosophy, or immortalized as legislators; or among the Bards of Greece and Rome, chaunting the siege of Troy, or humming the sonnets of love,—or among the Modern Poets, Authors, and Philosophers, I know of none who have achieved more universal renown than the author of “Lacon.” Even Shakespeare, the most popular of all Poets, from his unequalled faculty of painting the passions of nature in its own language, has failed to acquire that singular concentration of glory which extinguishes the name of the author in the title of his work. For while the local dialects and provincial idioms of “the Bard of Avon,” have obstructed the transfusion of his beautiful thoughts and divine sentiments into all other languages, the classic elegance of “Lacon” glides into all other tongues, with the eloquent facility of an universal idiom, seeking its affinity, and at home in every land, where there is language to clothe wit, or words to embody wisdom. Pagan literature furnishes no parallel to the universal fame of Lacon. It is in the Bible only, that an equal celebrity can be shown; and that, only, in two of its most illustrious teachers—from whose hallowed lips fell the inspiration that has baffled the tempests of time, and survived the crash of empires, the convulsions of nature, and the passions of men.

What a commentary on the power of Intellect, when created in the colossal mould of genius, that can wrestle with time, and vanquish all impediments in its pathway to glory, is such a fame! whose stupendous grasp and vivid lustre, challenge all profane history to produce his equal in vain. "Lacon" stands alone, like a Temple of the Cities of the Plain on whose naked bosom no other vestige of magnificence remains; a grand and solitary monument of the power of man, swept into annihilation by the wrath of God, yet sparing one mighty pile, one gorgeous mass of mutilated beauty, in mercy to the hopes of man, as a warning to his presumption, and as an incentive to his powers; as an evidence at once, of the omnipotence of God, and the tremendous invention of the creature, who so often aspires to be more than human, and only falls when he dares to forget his fallibility!

To tread on the ashes of the desolated plain, where cities have once proudly reared their temples to the skies, and massive monuments of sublime construction spread their broken columns at our feet, is so analogous to the task of him who undertakes to discourse of the genius, the career and the doom of Colton, as to conjure up to the imagination, all the pomp and pride of the Assyrian monarch, who immortalized Babylon by the sumptuousness of his luxury, and the elegance of his vices; the pomp of his effeminacy and the gorgeous splendour of his crimes; the violence of his polished passions, and the overwhelming luxuriance of his pampered appetites; the imposing splendour of his pageant life, and the grovelling infamy of his cowardly death, voluptuous even to the last sigh of his bosom.

Where, amidst the ruins of the fame of Colton, shall I search for the history of his life? A glory so universal is seldom unattended by the pen of panegyric, the lamentations of friendship, the detail of the biographer, or the flattery of the executor. Around the glory of the sun, there will always cluster minor planets, basking in his beams, and radiant with the shower of light that in his pathway, he scatters upon all who follow in his track. The most humble bard who strikes the feeblest lyre with the most timid hand, will always find a friend, a follower, or a votary, to sing his praises, and share the reflected lustre of his little fame, if it be honourable to claim the credit of his friendship. How few who live in the mouths of men through all time—who have achieved

glory by wakening in the minds of others, the thoughts that burn, or in their bosoms, the feelings that thrill their hearts with rapture, how few ever die, without extorting from some passion of our nature, the memorial of love, of admiration, or of esteem? In a rapid survey of the records of human history, not one can I remember, save Colton, who have startled the world by the giant powers of an immortal Intellect, and yet have gone down to the grave with no written tribute to their manly worth; no beaming portrait, painted by the pencil of affection, or of esteem.

No! we have no biography of C. C. Colton!

Why have we none? Had Lacon no friend?

The echoes that reverberate the question, confound the understanding by the awful silence that hangs around his grave.

Why have we none? Had Lacon no glory. Hush! Hush!

Who more celebrated? Who in point of genius, more worthy of engrossing the pen of the historian, or inspiring the imagination of the poet to chaunt his praise? Why should the blackness of night, awful and mysterious in its murky shroud, envelope the history of the man, whose name is a cloud of fire,—and whose glory is the radiance of the sun—whose soul was the giant that can slay error in her dark caverns, and array truth in her robes of overpowering effulgence?

An answer rises in mournful tones of melancholy dread, from the mists that overshadow the doom of the most unfortunate of the sons of genius:—it rises from the mists of the tomb!

The author of "Lacon" was a drunkard, a gambler and a suicide! What perfume can overpower the smell of blood! How the soul shudders and shrinks, under the overwhelming humility of its frailty, when made sensible of the reeling imbecility of the physical man, whose genius could rival the wisdom of imperial prophets, and engrave lessons of learning on the hearts of unborn generations of children, as if endowed with a divine instinct, to imprint the wisdom of heaven, in all the simplicity of natural truth! Who can believe that reads his noble effusions, that "Colton" was a drunkard,—a gambler,—and a suicide! The contradiction seems too monstrous for belief. The mind revolts from the irreconcilable discrepancy, between a genius so splendid, and a moral and physical propensity so grovelling, so debased, so abandoned! What! such a man of genius a drunkard? Yes, that is possible!

For we have seen it in a Burns! in a Byron! in a Sheridan! but a gambler! and a suicide! Here the reason and the judgment become bewildered by conflicting doubts! Yet what is the scale of decline in the career of vice? Begin with drunkenness, and where can you fix the limits of descending depravity? Extinguish the reason—let the divine light of the soul go out, stifled by the fumes of intoxication, whether these fumes rise from the goblet of champagne and madeira, of hock or burgundy—or the more ignoble glass of whiskey, beer or rum, and who shall say whether the brute man freed from his divine guide, will rush on murder, or turn to the gamester's hell, or plunge into the suicide's grave! The fate of "Colton," only illustrates the common power of the wine cup, over the destiny of its victim. Bereft of reason, what is the man reeling under the noble exhilaration of champagne, but the furious lion, lashing his untamed passions into madness, or the frantic tiger, bounding and leaping on his prey, with foaming mouth, and wide distended jaws, hungry for blood, and panting to destroy! What shall oppose his course? Not his friend, for now he would sweep him from his path by a pistol ball as his most deadly foe. Not his wife, for even her, would he murder in the boiling wrath of his brutal passions, should she dare to cross his path, when the demon is raging in his heart, that turns love into hate, and transforms the very milk of kindness into the bitter venom of hell. Not his conscience, for it has fled with his reason. Not his honour for that is the offspring of conscience. Not his shame, for that departed with his sobriety. Not his love of glory, for ambition never yet cohabited with infamy. What then shall restrain the drunkard from becoming the gamester and the suicide? Not religion, for that would have prevented him from becoming a drunkard!

Once a victim to the wine-cup, and the fall is not only easy, but irresistible to every stage of crime. In the inebriate, the degradation of human intellect is complete. There is no lower stage of shame, or of infamy, though there is a more perfect consummation of crime, which lies coiled up and enveloped in his soul, like a nest of serpents, waiting only the brooding wrath of passion, to hatch "the bloody progeny of hell!" Fall down to the lowest point of moral guilt he may, covered with the blood of his dearest friend, in the deadly duel, or the wife of his bosom, in frantic passion,

wreaking cowardly revenge upon helpless weakness—but perpetrated or not his soul once drunk, has conceived the horrid crimes, from which accidental insensibility may have snatched him.

From one excitement to another, the transition is easy and natural, sated by the exhilaration of the goblet, the gnawing irritation of the mind flies with the ardour of love, and the infatuation of passion to the still fiercer excitements of the gaming table, where, without being drunk, the soul may lose all consciousness of life in the raging fever of hope and fear. Few sober men visit the gaming table, for shame deters all, but callous villainy from the acquisition of money, by the mere accident of chance, the game to the sober, looks too much like open robbery, to be prosecuted with the vigour necessary to insure success. Hence the gambler is apt to be a drunkard, and the drunkard, almost by an irresistible fatality turns gamester—thus forming a combination of low, vile, detestable and infamous qualities, from which to expect good would be worse than folly, or, to be surprised at evil, of any description, would imply inexperience, if not denote fatuity.

“Colton,” was a clergyman, of the Church of England, a scholar, a wit, a man of the world, a votary of pleasure, and the companion of noblemen! Imbibing the habits, as he imitated the manners of an order of men whose destiny dooms them, either to shine in the cabinet, or roll in the kennel—he found a license in the fashion of the times, first for the intemperance of the dinner table and lastly for the wild excitements of the gamester’s hell. There is, in the excesses of the bottle, a sense of degradation so keen, as to drive a refined mind, to what are deemed nobler stimulants, which inflame, without driving their victim into insensibility. The gaming table among English noblemen, is the natural sequel of the day’s dissipation, winding up the fashionable occupations of idleness, by inflaming the passions to the deliberate perpetuation of fashionable robbery; and blunting the sense of honour so effectually, as to reduce the plunder and ruin of a friend, to an act, at once meritorious, manly and consoling. This hallucination even extends to life, and the utterance of a hasty word, wrung from the tortured heart, by the anguish of impending ruin, is sufficient to increase the merit of the gambler, should he become guilty of the murder of his dearest friend. By a rational extension of the same principle, the victim who has been plucked

of his last guinea by his best friend, whose credit is worn threadbare, and whose fortunes, are of that class termed desperate,—is admonished by the cold looks of his former companions, that he has no honourable refuge, but in the doom of the suicide. Fallen into poverty,—a victim to inebriation—a disgrace to his friends—the dread of scorn, the sneer of contempt, the pang of contumely soon complete his loathsomeness of life—till in the fit of desperation that forms the climax of a man, to whom even “hope is dead,” he grasps the pistol of the suicide, and leaves his carcass, as a monument of the depravity of his own career, and the cold heartlessness of his companions—who first seduce, then plunder, and finally forsake him.

In the fashionable habits of that class of society, who tempt the wit, the genius, and the man of learning, to forsake the path of temperance, for the giddy heights of the goblet, the fascination of the sparkling banquet, and the wild mania of the gaming table, resides a radical error, that sheds a most consuming blight upon the face of social happiness. It would be idle to dissemble the fact, that fashion bears an imperious sway over the mightiest minds, which religion, morals and principle, fail to exercise and are ineffectual to repel. It is in the highest range of hills, that the mountain torrent first gathers its infant waters, before it bursts with desolating violence on the plains below. It is from the highest strata of society, that vices flow down upon the more humble members, who look with admiring wonder upon the lofty splendour that casts them into shape. The fashion of dissipation, in the high, becomes the fever of intemperance in the middle and more inferior classes. The glow of rank, the glitter of wealth, the imposing beauty of taste, all add to the baneful influence of vice, in the nobleman, and the gentleman, by shedding around it a halo, that not only strips it of its deformity, but invests it with a charm. The imitator of his superior, while catching the vice that brands him with infamy, or prepares him for crime, forgets to discriminate between the power of that wealth, which secures impunity to the opulent profligate, and the impotence of that poverty, which dooms the humble to shame for his transgression.

While nature always competent to protect herself, vindicates her own principles by the physical and mental punishment of the votaries of intemperance—public opinion, formed from the social

decrees of infallible reason, protects the mass of society from the fruits of its brutalizing shame. If wealth and rank, can rise superior to that salutary curb on infamous propensities, they cannot evade the penalty which nature imposes for their transgressions, in bodies made loathsome by disease,—in a progeny rendered imbecile by indulgence, nor can they escape that dread accountability to God, which the endless future of a world of retribution, expiation, and atonement, opens before them. But the author of “Lacon” was a clergyman of the Church of England! Could not religion restrain, save and reclaim him? Did the balm of heaven, fall upon his heart, as upon a barren rock?

It did—And what is the inference? His heart was not imbued with vital religion. To be a clergyman, is not at all times to be a Christian; especially in that country, where the church establishment is vested in the patronage of the nobility, for the temporal benefit of their younger sons. “Colton” was a clergyman, which, in England, means only that his income was derived from church rates. His wit made him a man of fashion. His learning made him a man of influence. His genius made him a man of dissipation. His dissipation made him a suicide!

Nothing is more fatal to virtue, than the sensitive temperament of genius. Nervous, irritable, and imaginative, the man of rich endowments of intellect, becomes a mere infant in the tempest tost sea of temptation. His yielding sympathies bow to every breeze that wafts around him. If Pleasure but nods to him, without waiting for her to open her arms, he rushes to her embrace. If applause rings in his ears, at the felicity of his wit, or the power of his reason, he loses all self-control, and riots in the delirium of anticipated fame, only to fall into the snares of the flatterer, or follow in the track of the libertine. Receiving all nature into the laboratory of his imagination, there to mould it into fresh forms of beauty, he becomes as pliant to surrounding circumstances, as he is powerful in converting every external element to the nourishment and vigor of his own conceptions. Mysterious and inexplicable power of genius! That like an infant yields to every embrace of smiling emotion, and yet like a giant, can grapple with mountains and forge a new creation from thy mental furnace? Irresistible! Impetuous! Overpowering Genius! In intellectual might so transcendant! In moral energy so imbecile—

in virtuous resolution so feeble—in manly self-denial so powerless—at once the wonder of men, the marvel of the world, the paragon of animals—and the puppet of the worst passions, that reduce the God of reason to the level of brute matter ! Illustrious spectacle of power and imbecility, over which humanity weeps her tears of compassion, while admiration shouts her applause for her achievements of science, her works of art, and her monuments of invention.

The susceptibility of genius to external impressions, can never however, be admitted as a plea in extenuation of vice, for that susceptibility is counterbalanced by powers of reason denied to less gifted mortals, and obviously designed to counteract that intensity and vividness of impression, which is supposed to render it a hopeless victim to surrounding influences. This latent energy of great minds, snatches thousands from ruin. It saved Dr. Johnson from becoming a drunkard, Goldsmith from becoming a vagabond, and Shakespeare from turning a highway robber. Who can believe that Savage, the Poet, could not have become as illustrious an example of piety, as his friend Dr. Johnson, had he rallied the vast energies of his soul, and cast himself in prayer at the footstool of a merciful God ! Who can believe, but that Byron, endowed with such tremendous energies of mind, could as readily have directed that power to self-denial, as to self-indulgence ? And who can believe, but that the same genius which made Colton a drunkard, a gamester and a suicide, would have secured him, if properly directed, habits of temperance and virtue ; a life of piety, and a death-bed of Christian tranquillity, free from a single pang of compunction and remorse, and a monument prouder than the pyramids of Egypt !

On this subject, Lacon himself has given an admirable lesson from his own mouth. He says ;

“ The great examples of Bacon, of Milton, of Newton, of Locke and of others, happen to be directly against the popular inference that a certain wildness of eccentricity, and thoughtlessness of conduct are the necessary accompaniments of talents and the rare indications of genius. Because some have united these extravagances with great demonstrations of talent, as a Rosseau, a Chatterton, a Burns, or a Byron ; others finding it less difficult to be eccentric than to be brilliant, have therefore adopted the

one, in hopes that the world would give them credit for the other. But *the greatest genius* is never so great, as when it is *chastised and subdued by the highest reason*. And be it remembered, that minds of the very highest order, who have given an unrestrained course to their caprice or their passions, *would have been so much higher by subduing them.*"

Can we excuse such a man for his vices?

And who, while listening to such exalted sentiments of pure morality, ever could suspect, that they flowed from the pen of a giant genius, who had fallen into the infamy of intemperance and gambling, as the prelude to suicide? Alas! for the inconsistency of Genius!

It is manifest from every page of his works, that Colton was a man deeply tinged with every worldly passion, and that while his physical nature was prone to the unrestrained gratification of fierce desires and degrading appetites, that his intellectual spirit soared into purer regions, basking in the sunlight of the highest moral peaks that overshadowed the pathway of life. In every sentiment that flows in golden wisdom from his fluent pen, we trace the features of a bright spirit fallen into ruin! Of a noble genius, who had lingered among the caverns of life, till his effulgence had been soiled and tarnished by the murky contact of depravity. In the very first paragraph of his PREFACE to "*Lacon*," we find this celestial garment, clinging about his limbs, wet with the unwholesome perspiration that agony distills from the hot atmosphere of the gambler's "*hell*," showing that his soul had become so imbued with cards, that even to think through the medium of the gamester's passion, had become indispensable to his perspicuity. Listen to the opening of *Lacon*!

"There are three difficulties in authorship; to write any thing worth publishing; to find honest men to publish it; and to get sensible men to read it. Literature has now become *a game*, in which the booksellers are the kings—the critics the knaves—the public the pack, and the poor Author the mere table or thing played upon."

Little did he think when these lines were written in all the playfulness of metaphor, drawn from the favorite passion of his heart, that this table and that pack would plunge him into the premature grave of the desperate gambler!

In another part of this same Preface, I find a sort of regretful and pensive confession, that his better nature had been led astray by worldly passions, contrary to his own judgment. He says;

“He who studies *Books* alone, will know how things *ought* to be; and he that studies *men* will know how things *are*; and it would have been impossible to have written these pages, without mixing somewhat *more freely* with the world, than inclination might prompt, or judgment approve.”

Here, we discern the sun-burst of a Divine Intellect, breaking through the clouds of dissipation that enthralled him in despite of conscience, which is evidently implied in the term, “judgment approve,” but which obviously means, a higher and more sacred monitor, whose still small whisperings carried to his soul, the crash of thunder, armed with the power of God. And yet, though it appalled, it could not sway him—though it fell like the knell of fate upon his mind, it could not arrest his fatal career, or snatch him from the gulf that yawned to devour him. The melody of the siren spell bound his heart in pleasure.

What a world of human destiny—of evil—of guilt—of misery—of remorse—is contained in the few lines I have just quoted! Understood, according to *the key*, which a knowledge of the man of the world places in our hands, what a field of libertinism do they not display to view—expansive in every odious vice—unbounded in every loathsome passion—fertile in every bitter pang!

In that extraordinary Book called “*Lacon*,” how many startling beauties of a lofty and refined soul arrest attention, and make us pause with wonder to inquire—“Could this have been written by an inebriate? Can these be the thoughts of a gamester? Are these indeed the reflections of a suicide?” Yes, alas! Such is humanity, when its frail nature permits the sentinel discretion, to slumber at his post, or the enemy of reason, Intemperance, to invade the tranquil enclosure of the passions that keep watch over virtue.

Yet the man who spent so much of his life in drinking and other debasing vices, that found their consummation only in a voluntary death, could, with pride in his eye, and dignity on his brow, pen these lines, as if in satire upon his own duplicity.

“Mental pleasures never cloy; unlike those of the body they are increased by repetition, approved of by reflection, and strengthened by enjoyment.”

What a commentary on the philosophy of Lacon.

One more passage from Lacon, obtrudes itself, as presenting one of the most extraordinary examples of moral contrast, to the life of this singular man, to be found in the whole range of human history. The quotation is worthy of being engraven on every human heart. He says, speaking of Reason as superior to instinct ;

“ Five thousand years have added no improvement to the hive of the bee, or to the house of the beaver ; but look at the habitations and achievements of man ; observe Reflection, Experience, Judgment, at one time enabling the head to save the hand ; at another dictating a wise and prospective economy exemplified in the most lavish expenditure of means, but to be paid with the most usurious interest, by the final accomplishment of ends. We might also add another distinction, peculiar, I conceive, to Reason, the *deliberate choice of a small present evil, to obtain a greater distant good* : he that on all *necessary occasions* can act upon this single principle, is as superior to other men, as other men to the brutes. And as the exercise of this principle is the perfection of Reason, it happens, also, as might have been anticipated, to form the chief task assigned us by Religion, and this task is in a great measure accomplished, from the moment our lives exhibit a *practical assent to one eternal and immutable truth ; the necessary and final connection between happiness and virtue and misery and vice !* ”

Not often do we meet with the sweet consolations of a religious feeling in the writings of “ Colton,” but when we do, astonishment is naturally excited, that they did not exercise a more absolute sway, over his susceptible nature, and rescue him from the raging torrent of passions, that finally drove him to rush into the presence of his God, with all his sins upon his head, unannointed, unannealed ? Feeling, deep, powerful, tender, full of pathos, and melting even into womanish softness, was a prominent trait of his heart, which while it was prone to overflow with benevolence, yet was often made bitter, by his experience of the world’s selfishness, and its destitution of sympathy, for the tender emotions of our better nature. In his poem of the “ Hypocrite,” we behold all this softness of his nature, gushing out in turbid billows of bitter thoughts, turned acid by the uncongenial insensibility of those around him. How admirably tuned by fine affections was the bosom of such a man to the softening rays of religious love ! And

why did his heart reject the profferd boon? Why did his bosom recoil from the gentle embrace of Piety? Why did his soul freeze into the coldness of stoic apathy, and hush its soft whisperings of love, in the stern resolves of callous pride? Why, when the world crushed his heart, his bleeding, wounded, palpitating heart; why did he turn, with cold averted look, from the smiling benignity of the Christian's hope? Because, deluded man, he mistook the poison for the balm;—and had seized the wine cup, to drown those sorrows, for a season, to which it but added more terrific agony, when, temporary oblivion past, it was succeeded by aggravated horrors. Acute, sensitive, intense, morbid, and nervous, must have been the feelings of "Colton." Every sentiment of his mind betrays it—every page of his writings records it—every sentence of his cynical wisdom reveals it. He was a man of crushed hopes and withered heart. Perhaps love, blighted in its sunny season of blossoms, by the adverse blast of disappointment, or mounting ambition, that last infirmity of noble minds, coeval with the infant throbs of genius, and lusting to rule with every swelling tide of burning thought! Whatever the cause, we behold the heart of Colton a volcano of boiling lava, surrounded by the cold cinders of the wise cynic, and the biting sarcasm of the half suppressed satyrist;—his life a load of agony concealed beneath the wine leaves of Bacchus, and panting under the desperate excitements of the gambler's god—blind chance! What a picture for humanity to weep over! For philosophy to deplore! For religion to mourn!

But for the goblet, Colton had been religious!

But for the goblet, he had been happy!

But for the goblet he had been honoured!

Colton was a Poet. His vivid imagination burns on every line. His intense feelings gush forth in despite of the cold maxims of philosophy, the rigid structure of prose—the scorching sarcasm of satire, lashing the proud hypocrisy of man; or the frigid judgment that could dissect the anatomy of human emotions, in order to discover *the nerve* of the predominant passion. His dissecting knife, was wreathed with roses, even to the heel of the handle; and perfumes scented the air, amidst the moral offal, that in his operations, he was forced to fling about, in order to obtain a clear view of his dead subject.

It is not among the least curious or the least instructive of the characteristic features of "Colton" to know what were his opinions in relation to suicide!—to life! and to religion! Though an Author may often write, what he does not believe, yet, as a general rule, it is reasonable to infer, that when he writes earnestly, he records his sincere opinions. Judging the Author of "Lacon," by this rule, he was well prepared by his train of thought, for the life he led, the dissipation he indulged in, and the tragic end that crowned with appropriate horror a career of vice, profligacy, and irreligion. It is true, that he *professed* to believe in Christianity, which, as a minister of God, he could not openly renounce—but how does he express himself in relation to belief in its doctrines? Hear him.—He puts a question hypothetically, in reference to the truth of Christian Revelation.

"We should embrace the Christian Religion, says 'Colton,' even on prudential motives; for a just and benevolent God, will not punish an intellectual being, for believing what there is so much reason to believe; therefore, we run no risk by receiving Christianity, if it be false, but a dreadful one by rejecting it if it be true."

A proposition more replete with false logic, contradiction, and danger, to the Christian Religion, cannot be found in the most offensive and rank productions of avowed infidelity, aiming at the total overthrow of the whole system on which Faith erects her altar consecrated to an immortal existence.

Of his opinions of life, and the estimation in which he held the human heart, some idea may be formed from the following passage from Lacon.

"Those who have a thorough knowledge of the human heart, will often produce all the best effects of the virtues, by a subtle appeal to the vanities of those with whom they have to do; and can cause the very weakness of our minds, indirectly to contribute to the furtherance of measures, from whose strength the powers of our minds would perhaps recoil, as unequal and inefficient. A preacher in the neighborhood of Blackfriars, not undeservedly popular, had just finished an exhortation strongly recommending the liberal support of a certain very meritorious Institution. The congregation was numerous, and the chapel crowded to excess. The discourse being finished, the plate was about to be handed round to the respective pews, when the preacher made this short address

to the congregation. 'From the great sympathy I have witnessed in your countenances, and the strict attention you have honoured me with, there is only one thing I am afraid of; that some of you may feel inclined to give too much; now it is my duty to inform you, that justice, though not so pleasant, yet should always be a prior virtue to generosity; therefore, as you will all be immediately waited upon in your respective pews, I wish to have it thoroughly understood that no person will think of putting any thing into the plate, *who cannot pay his debts.*' I need not add, says Colton, that this advice produced a most overflowing collection."

The viciousness of this story consists in the cold-blooded advice of Colton, to produce the best effects of the virtues without reference to their actual existence; to produce false charity by stratagem, and so of all the other virtues that ought to adorn the heart, not owe their semblance to the head.

In all the voluminous beauties of Lacon, I find but one opinion of gamblers; and that is awfully prophetic of his own fate. He says;

"The Gambler if he die a martyr to his profession is doubly ruined. He adds his soul to every other loss, and by the act of suicide, renounces earth to forfeit heaven!"

Who could ever anticipate that the author of a picture so horrible, would ever have filled the grave he so fearfully described?

Drunkenness, the vice that lured him to suicide, he thus describes; "Drunkenness is the vice of a good constitution, or of a bad memory; of a constitution so treacherously good, that it never bends until it breaks; or, of a memory that recollects the pleasure of getting drunk, but forgets the pains of getting sober."

If Lacon has written great wisdom, so has he certainly written great folly. He affixes an *if* to the Christian Religion; and discourses of the *pleasure* of getting drunk. And yet with all its faults, what Author is superior? What work more useful? What learning more profound? What wit more dazzling?

Having drained the cup of pleasure to the dregs, in his own country, having exhausted London of its revels—worn out his fickle fortunes at every gaming table—ruined his credit—and brought the blush of shame to the cheek of his disgusted friends—Colton, like all the broken down votaries of chance, abandoned

his native land, in the hope, that on the continent he could better his condition. Paris, of course loomed glaringly in his eye, as the Eden of the desperate gambler:—Paris! the capital of hope to the bankrupt nobleman—the climate of health to the worn out debauchee—the last stage on which the gambler acts, and on which he so often dies!—Where kings congregate to dispose of dynasties, and swindlers resort to plot depredations—where genius may find its peer, and villainy never fail of a companion; but where virtue cannot resort for safety; nor remorse to complete penitence, or commence reformation.

Driven out, rather than self banished by his vices from London, —Colton, ignominious as a clergyman, and disgraced as a man, was next discovered as an inmate of the most degraded “hells” of Paris. When he arrived there, or how long he remained, are matters of little moment, in estimating a career, whose final plunge into ruin, was so horrible and overwhelming. Imagination can readily draw a picture of his life, from the catastrophe of its end; and while we may compassionate the dread infatuation of the victim, we cannot withhold a rigorous condemnation of the culprit. The agony that wrung his soul in protracted tortures, may be inferred from the means he resorted to, in order to escape from the consciousness of misery; but of these miseries he was himself the parent; being the self-tormentor, the self-accuser, the self-destroyer! Whom, then, could he upbraid? Whom could he chide? To whom could he appeal for succour and consolation, but to that power, against whom, he had turned his back? He had no refuge but in religion, and I have shown from his sentiments, as he himself proved from his life, that the sacred consolations and melting love of Divine truth, was to him a sealed book. From this single point, germed his total ruin. Had he but served his God, as he had served the world, he would not have been forsaken in his extremity.

No man who ever departed from the high and broad path of virtue, had so little to excuse his derelictions as Colton. His living furnished him a competency. He could not plead the stings of poverty in palliation of the aberrations of youth. He was a scholar, and scanned all men with a learned eye; and could not alledge ignorance in defence of his depravity. He was a worldling, and therefore forewarned of the fate that overtakes the vo-

tary of the wine bottle, and the gaming table. He was a clergyman, and had every high inducement to tread the path of glory and shun the byways of shame. He was a philosopher and well qualified to affix a rational value to every enjoyment; foreknowing the penalty attending a departure from right. Would that I could add that in his heart he had been a Christian, and feared God! In that event I should have been saved the trouble of this lecture on his fate.

It is only when we contemplate the pernicious influence of a dissipated state of society, upon the destiny of a man so divinely gifted as Colton, that we become suddenly struck with the importance of what are called in Europe, the manners and morals of the great; and known in this country by the term fashionable or respectable. It is in this class of life, that all the enticements so exuberantly abound, which tempt the gifted children of genius to venture on that slippery margin, where pleasure sports in sunbeams, and dissipation revels in the melody of seeming innocence. Gilded by the magic influence of good society, sanctioned by its example—made attractive, imposing, nay, even contagious by its adoption—what vice can fail to find its votaries, what frailty miss its crowd of followers? Is it a marvel, even that *clergymen* should fall, when the highest class of society, set the example of contamination? Is it a marvel that priests, curates, deacons, and doctors, imbibe the odious and detestable habit of intemperance, when the prince gets drunk, the peer is never sober, the earl is a brandy toper, and the man of fashion and of fortune an inebriate and a libertine? I speak now of England; intending to invite your imaginations to draw the republican parallel in plastic America, where madeira and champagne, cogniac and burgundy supply rank and fashion, with a substitute for rum, whiskey and gin, of the more humble and poverty-stricken followers of “the rosy god.”

Among the ancient Greeks or Romans, the genius of Colton, amidst all his frailties, would have procured him a monument as proud and imperishable as the pyramids of Egypt, and an eulogium gilded by the spirit of eloquence, perhaps hallowed by the music of poetry when touched by the charm of inspiration. Among a Christian people, and in a land consecrated to the inviolable sanctity of life, from the ruffian hand of the suicide; his honours turn to shame, and the pall of ignominy falls upon the

bier, where lies outstretched in the majesty of death, the ashes of a spirit, heroic in all things but its passions, its vices and its end.

What a glorious commentary on Christianity, is furnished by the simple fact, that this illustrious man, has been commemorated by no biographer because of his vices ! That shame even held back friendship from the task, lest honour should be lost, or reputation tarnished, even while sketching the portrait of the libertine, whose life, however wretched, was a libel on humanity, an insult to decorum, an outrage on morals, and a crime against religion.

Yet there is a tear, even for poor Colton ! The religion that commands us to avoid his crimes, also enjoins us to forgive them. The sense of duty, that has denied a monument to his memory, likewise urges us to throw the veil of charity over his foibles. As a child of feeling, let feeling weep for him. As the offspring of Genius, let us convert our homage into compassion, and while we remember his errors, to avoid them, let us forgive his transgressions, as a part of that frailty, which is the common lot of man. The divinity of his intellect will live forever, and instruct millions in lessons of virtue, as some atonement for an example that might embolden vice to imitate its superior. His infirmities have perished with his mortal tenement. His genius and his writings will endure, to shed light on remote ages ;—when our times shall seem to posterity, as the mists of Egypt appear to us, with this difference only, that in the mellow tints of the radiant distance, the effulgence of his mind will blaze like the burning star, that chases the shadows of night, into the glories of the breaking dawn.

If the traveller in his wanderings through distant climes, should ever light upon an humble stone, rearing its rustic front to mark the spot where the poor suicide sleeps in the silence of an humble grave, he would inscribe on it under the influence of feeling, admiration, pity and religion, something like this ;

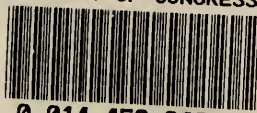
POOR COLTON ;

IN INTELLECT, A GOD !—

In Frailty, less than man !

Pity gives him a tear ! Fame decrees him an immortality ! Charity flings the mantle of human frailty over errors that may only be remembered to be shunned.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 456 042 5

PR 4501
C4 Z5

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 456 042 5

Hollinger Corp.

pH 8.5